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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON HARIRI'S ASSASSINATION

Summary

-- Coverage of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and its aftermath dominate reporting in all papers published today, February 15. Banner headlines in all papers highlight reports that feature regional and international reactions to the assassination and explore the potential repercussions on Lebanon as well as the speculated involvement of Syria in the attack. Majority of commentaries feature emotional condemnation and denunciation of the attack and urge the Lebanese people to pull together.

Editorial Commentary

-- "The crime of assassinating Hariri"

Daily columnist Jamil Nimri writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (02/15): "The tape that Al-Jazirah TV showed after the assassination was not convincing and did not establish the party responsible for Hariri's assassination. The name of the organization, which was unknown previously, is meant to suggest a link with the Zarqawi grouping, and yet going to Lebanon to assassinate Hariri is meaningless and plays no part in the agenda of such organizations. Moreover, the justification given for the assassination, namely Hariri's relations with Saudi Arabia, is weak and simply increases doubts about the existence of this group.. This crime is a disaster that has shaken Lebanon and the Arab world and gives rise to concerns about potential disastrous repercussions against Lebanon.. The question that poses itself is whether Syria, in view of the current situation and developments, would put itself in such a position increasing the pressures that it is already coming under. Speculations circulated madly yesterday and all possibilities were put forth. We cannot do anything but wait for a serious and reliable investigation by the Lebanese parties and particularly the opposition. This is the only way to calm flaring tempers and ease the tension."

-- "Assassinating Lebanon's peace and stability"

Chief editor Taher Udwan writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (02/15): "When it comes to such a serious event with all these aspects that are prone to explosion, one cannot rule out the presence of foreign hands that seek to take advantage of the domestic crisis and make Lebanon another case like Iraq, especially now that all accounts indicate that the losers in Iraq are going to lose the entire Middle East and that if there was no room for profit in Baghdad the disaster should be general and comprehensive.. If international terrorism is not responsible, then the perpetrators are countries, governments and intelligence rings. This means that terrorism is becoming active in the region and is developing through the entry of new official members who have decided, it seems, to exercise state terrorism in this conflict of the age that was inaugurated by the American-British invasion and the occupation of Iraq. What happened in Beirut yesterday is a serious indication of the future of the region that has been suffering from American military and political pressures for years. Assassinating Hariri definitely sends a strong message to Syria that its coming days in Lebanon are going to be very difficult, as it appears Security Council resolution 1559 is not much different from the resolutions that targeted Iraq prior to the invasion, the occupation and the disaster."

-- "Who benefits from Rafik Hariri's assassination?"

Columnist Lamis Andoni writes on the op-ed page of independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (02/15): "Various parties pointed accusatory fingers to Damascus after the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister.. The question is: what does Syria gain from such an assassination, particularly in view of Syria's regional and international position after the escalation of the American campaign and the expanding coalition against the presence of the Syrian army in Lebanon from a small circle of right-wing parties that could be seen as allied with Israel to a larger sector involving all the political sects of Lebanon known for their position against Israel and even the U.S. policy in the region? Unfortunately, one could say here that Syria might have been wise to rectify its position in Lebanon, and more specifically put an end to its security intervention that has upset its allies and its enemies. I do not mean by this a Syrian surrender to American and Israeli demands. But Syria's lack of timely movement and its insistence on intervention and on extending President Lahoud's term in office has forced the Lebanese to revolt, not to mention creating additional pressure of American and Israeli threats to Lebanon.. (There is an) alliance between Lebanese right-wing personalities and Israeli personalities and (U.S.) neo-conservative figures: this alliance was openly declared in 1996 under the title of "the American committee for a free Lebanon" whose objectives included undermining the regime in Lebanon. The names of Americans on this committee included the most prominent names of the neo-conservative leadership, such as Richard Perle and Douglas Faith and others known for their close relationship with the Likud or for their participation in the document that was published under the name 'a clean break from the realm', in which Perle and Faith had recommended to Netanyahu to follow a strategy of undermining the regimes in Iraq and Syria and to use Lebanon to strike against Syria, not to mention the establishment of an alternative state for the Palestinians in Jordan.. The war on Syria has already begun and will take different forms. The repercussions of assassinating a prominent figure such as Hariri will weaken Syria and revive the ghost of separatism in Lebanon. I mean to say here that while we acknowledge Syria's sins and mistakes, we must not blind ourselves to the other factors in the formula as we start pointing fingers."

-- "This is terrorism"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (02/15) editorializes: "The assassination of Rafik Hariri with such a despicable terrorist attack constitutes a real disaster, a resonating shock and a great loss. It is a crime that reflects the brutality of its perpetrators and their satanic scheme of targeting the security and stability of all Arab countries.. The most serious thing about the religious rhetoric of terrorist groups is the fact that it can be used by numerous parties. Its methods serve foreign schemes more than anything else, be it on the level of undermining stability, increasing domestic conflicts, creating sectarianism, or even using the war on terrorism to achieve other objectives. It is clear that the terrorist attack did not target the life of Rafik Hariri as much as it wanted to ignite a stage of chaos and corruption, whereby the Arab and Muslim world would become ripe ground for plans of hegemony and whereby the Arab nation loses itself and become void of all form, identity and ambition and burdened by challenges and crises and thus fails to benefit or reap the fruits of its riches and resources."

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